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RGN: 1301

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MARCH 3, 1959

FROM: Mission BERLIN

TO: Ambassador Bonn 0-139
Secretary of State 0-318REF: POLAD USAMUR UNN
Paris UNN
London UNN

Moscow UNN

REF: Cortal 316 to Bonn, 364 to Dept.

Paris for Embassy, USRO, CINCPAC Thurston & West

In refal Mission reported factors likely to influence Soviet-GDR judgment re sealing off West Berlin from East Berlin and Soviet Zone and concluded that GDR likely to move progressively to tighten controls in order reduce East German access to West sectors but unlikely attempt sudden seal-off West Berlin per se. We have subsequently reported views of Governing Mayor Brandt (0-238 to Dept) as well as expectations of East German residents and refugees (0-252 and 0-275 to Dept) to effect that West Berlin borders may be sealed off from East Sector and Zone by end of May. (In discussing "seal-off", we have reference to movement of persons and not rpt not goods, which might continue even if movement persons brought to halt).

Events since November appear to have reduced validity of factors listed refal tending deter GDR action to seal-off West Berlin, and therefore likelihood such action taking place appears increased. In addition, intelligence information indicates that physical preparations necessary to divert or stop public transportation between West Berlin and Soviet Zone and East Berlin have been completed for several months (Mission's Despatch No. 613 of March 3, 1959). However, in view close relationship between action to seal off Berlin and basic issues raised by Khrushchev Nov 27 note, we cannot define precise likelihood seal-off since it obviously dependent upon unpredictable overriding factors such as Four-Power Conference, etc.

While in November we were inclined to feel that possible seal-off West Berlin would be gradual in nature, emergence of tougher Sov line on Berlin in recent weeks makes it seem less likely that Sovs-GDR would act with restraint in isolating West Berlin from Soviet Zone and East Berlin, and that, depending again on course of developments in coming months, seal off could well be sudden in nature.

Obviously one of many serious consequences of seal-off West Berlin would be elimination of city as escape hatch for refugees. As May approaches and particularly as belief that GDR authorities will cut off

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access to West Berlin by East residents gains currency in East Zone, it is possible that increasing number of persons will flee the East Zone, regarding it as their last chance. This view shared by Berlin officials of Federal Republic, Ministry, as well as local British officials, other Western observers, and East German residents (but not by Soviet official in charge of refugees, Diefeld, who would not specify his reasons for disagreeing). Increase could be comparable to that reached first half 1953 when as many as 54,000 sought asylum in West Berlin in one month alone.

Refugee officials state they are confident physical facilities for handling increased flow are adequate. Present transit camp capacity 6,900, including "reserve" places. By end April capacity will be increased to 8,200. Through utilization empty places in permanent camps, putting beds in kindergartens and recreation rooms and allotting less space to refugees, capacity could be raised to approximately 12,000. However adequacy of present facilities is based on heavy reliance on program of flying out refugees immediately after arrival (Aktion Stoppuhr, started September 1958). Should there be interruption in commercial air traffic, a serious overcrowding situation could develop.

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